War Stories(1) The Battle of Saipan (June 15-July 9+α, 1944)

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戦史（1）— サイパン戦（1944年 6 月15日～ 7 月 9 日＋ α ）

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本論文では、玉砕の島での戦闘、捕虜の体験（自らの判断か偶然か、生き延びることになった日本人兵士の一人である夫の叔父の視点）、サイパン戦を舞台にした 4 本の映画の登場人物を考察する。さらに、2011年に私自身がこの島を訪れて思ったことを添えたい。

Learning a New Word — *Gyokusai*

When I graduated from high school, my maternal grandmother gave me a copy of the newly-published *Reader's Digest Illustrated Story of World War II* as a gift. At that time, Vietnam was in the news, and World War II seemed very far away. My parents had graduated from high school around the time the war ended, but my paternal grandfather was on active duty as a medical officer in the Navy in the Pacific theater. So, to me, it was my grandparents' war. I looked at the book my grandmother had given me, of course. When I read Captain Love's account of the banzai attack on Saipan that began in the pre-dawn hours of July 7, 1944, I must have noticed the word *gyokusai* (death with honor), but it slipped my mind until years later when I heard it again in some of the many documentaries about the war that are shown on Japanese television during August every year. As I have become more interested in learning about the conflict, especially about pre-war education and cultural ideas concerning life and death and the treatment of prisoners, the war has become more immediate. Its stories are worth preserving, I think, for their historical value and for the light they shed on human behavior in extreme situations. In this report, I will be examining the struggle on *gyokusai-no-shima* (suicide island) Saipan and life as a POW through the eyes of my husband's uncle, one of the few Japanese soldiers who somehow did not die there either by chance or by choice, and the characters in four films related to the Battle of Saipan. I will also be reflecting on my own trip to the island in 2011.

Saipan History

On planet Earth, Saipan is a mere speck. It is a Micronesian island about 12.5 miles (20.1 km) long and 5.5 miles (8.9 km) wide in the Pacific Ocean about 1,460 miles (2,349 km) south-southeast of Tokyo. For thousands of years, it has been home to an indigenous group of people called the Chamorros, traditional trading partners of another indigenous group of people living in the Carolines, and for more than 400 years, it has been the territory of a succession of foreign powers: the Spanish, the Germans, the Japanese, and since World War II, the Americans.

According to *History of the Northern Mariana Islands to Partition*, a textbook written for use in social studies classes in high schools in the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas and the Territory of Guam, no one really knows when the first people arrived, where they came from, or why. When the work of archaeologists, anthropologists, geneticists, and linguists is put together, however, a picture of migration to the islands emerges. For example, comparison of blood types and DNA shows that there is a connection between Mariana islanders and Southeast Asians. According to carbon dating on artifacts found in the Marianas, habitation of the islands of Micronesia began 3,500 to 4,000 years ago, after the people of Southeast Asia had learned how to do the following three things: grow their own food, build ocean-going outrigger canoes, and navigate. The oldest piece of pottery (called Marianas redware) found so far on Saipan is 3,700 years old and is similar to pottery found in the Philippines and Indonesia. Chamorro is an Austronesian root language related to the languages spoken by groups of people in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Taiwan; Carolinian is a non-Austronesian language related to Maori, Hawaiian, and Tahitian.

For the Marianas, recorded history began in 1521 AD, the year the first Europeans visited the islands. The late fifteenth century was the beginning of the European age of exploration and world trade. In particular, the Portuguese and the Spanish were actively competing for access to spices in the East Indies, so to settle this dispute, in 1497, Pope Alexander VI proposed the Treaty of Tordesillas. In this agreement, a line of demarcation was drawn down the middle of the Atlantic Ocean giving Spain the rights to all newly discovered lands to the west of the line in the New World and Portugal the rights to all newly discovered lands to the east in Africa and Asia.

In an effort to prove that the Spice Islands (now known as the Moluccas) belonged to Spain under the terms of the treaty, Ferdinand Magellan, a Portuguese-born navigator working for the king of Spain, proposed a westbound route from Europe to Asia. He and his men crossed the Atlantic Ocean, sailed around the tip of South America, crossed the Pacific Ocean, and on March 6, 1521, made landfall in the Marianas, most likely on the island of Guam. Due to language and cultural differences, their short stay was fraught with difficulties, and Magellan named the Marianas the *Islas de los Ladrones*, the Islands of the Thieves.

The next important visitor, expedition leader Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, left Acapulco in November 1564 and landed on Guam on January 22, 1565, where he formally claimed the Ladrones for Spain and informed the Chamorros they were now Spanish subjects. One ship from this expedition successfully returned to New Spain with a cargo of cinnamon, porcelain, and silks on October 8, 1565, the beginning of what eventually became known as the Manila Galleon trade and lasted for 250 years. Giant galleons loaded with soldiers and workers bound for the Spanish colony in Manila and cargos of silver, gold, cacao, cochineal, oil, and wines would leave Acapulco for the Philippines in March or April, and the Ladrones became a regular place for them to stop along the way for food and water.

In 1668, the Spanish sent soldiers and priests to found a colony in the Ladrones, and the islands were renamed *Islas Marianas* after the Queen Regent Mariana. A Jesuit priest, Diego Luis de Sanvitores, was given overall responsibility for the *reducción* of the Marianas, that is, making the local people adopt Spanish culture, become Catholic, and live in church-centered communities called *pueblos*. The last battle between the Chamorros and the Spaniards was fought in 1695 on Aguiguan, when all surviving Chamorros in the Northern Marianas, except for a few on Rota, were rounded up and re-settled on Guam and Saipan. The Chamorro population continued to decline after that, and the Spanish Governor decided to close the colony on Saipan and move the remaining Chamorros to Guam in 1722.

The people of the Caroline Islands were skilled navigators with a long history of trading with the Chamorros in the Marianas. Contact between them ceased during the period of Spanish rule in the Marianas because the Carolinians found it too dangerous to go there, but trade resumed in 1804. Around 1815, a group of Carolinians displaced from their homeland by a typhoon was granted permission to live on Saipan, which was then uninhabited, and they founded a village on the site that is now known as Garapan.

Events in the outside world in the nineteenth century affected the Marianas. In 1813, the Mexican congress signed its declaration of independence from Spain, and in 1815, the last galleon sailed the Acapulco-Manila route. Foreign ships from other countries began to arrive in the islands, and by the 1880s, Spain could no longer afford to support or defend its colonies. Germany and Japan were becoming world powers, and the United States was recovering from its civil war. As a result of the Spanish-American War in 1898, the United States took Guam and the Philippines, and Germany made a deal to buy the rest of Micronesia from Spain for $4.2 million. With this, nearly 400 years of Spanish rule came to an end, and the Marianas were politically separated into the US Trust Territory of Guam and the Marianas District of German Micronesia.

Over the next half century, the islands changed hands three times in rapid succession. Germany controlled the islands from 1899 until the end of World War I. Japan took over under a

mandate provided by the Treaty of Versailles, which was signed after the war in 1919, and from 1922 until the end of World War II continued to rule under a League of Nations mandate. From 1947, the Northern Marianas were administered by the United States as part of the United Nations Trust Territory of the Pacific, and since 1978, they have officially been the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in political union with the United States. Saipan is the center of government for the CNMI.

The Battle of Saipan

Unlike the European theater in World War II, where fighting largely took place on the European continent or in North Africa, battles in the Pacific were fought from island to island. In September 1943, the Japanese Imperial Headquarters determined the perimeter of the *Zettai Kokubouken* (Absolute National Defense Sphere), which included Chishima (the Aleutian Islands), the Ogasawara Islands, the Marianas, the Carolines, the western half of New Guinea, the Sunda Islands, and Burma. The purpose was to define the minimum amount of territory that was needed to keep the oil and other resources they wanted to control in Indonesia and to protect the shipping lanes to and from Japan. In 1942, the amount of territory controlled by Japan reached its furthest extent and also included Attu and Kiska in the Aleutians, the Gilbert Islands, and Guadalcanal in the Solomons. The line of the Absolute National Defense Sphere was inside the line for the territory Japan held in 1941 before the attack on Pearl Harbor, and it was considered absolutely essential to defend and maintain this area to protect the homeland.

For many Americans, "D-Day" stands for June 6, 1944, the start of the Allied invasion of Normandy. There were, however, many more amphibious invasions in World War II; in the Pacific theater, in fact, there was a total of 126. My *Reader's Digest Illustrated Story of World War II* contains sections on five of the most notable ones: Guadalcanal on August 7, 1942, Tarawa on November 20, 1943, Saipan on June 15, 1944, Iwo Jima on February 19, 1945, and Okinawa on April 1, 1945. The US operation plan for Saipan was code-named Operation Forager, and it followed a pattern begun in previous amphibious assaults in the Pacific. My references — Chapin (1994), Goldberg (2007), Hoffman (1950), Miller (2005), Morison (1953), and O'Brien (2003)—all describe the same chronology of events: the US surrounded the island with ships, began a few days of bombardment by air and sea, then sent troops ashore. On D-Day on Saipan, the 2nd Marine Division (under Major General Thomas E. Watson) and the 4th Marine Division (under Major General Harry Schmidt) landed men, weapons, and supplies on color-coded beaches on the southwestern side of the island around Chalan Kanoa; the Army's 27th Infantry Division (under Major General Ralph C. Smith) landed there the next day. The Japanese defenders (under Army Lieutenant General Yoshitsugu

Saito and Navy Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, who had commanded the forces that attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941) were ready for them in man-made bunkers and natural caves around the island. They fought for control of the island inch by inch, first across to the eastern side, then north to Marpi Point, for 25 days. As for the intensity of the battle, the numbers speak for themselves. Out of a total of over 70,000 on the American side, almost 3,000 were killed and over 10,000 were wounded. Out of a total of about 30,000 military personnel on the Japanese side, over 29,000 died and about 900 were taken prisoner, and in addition to this, many thousands of Japanese civilians either were killed or committed suicide.

The Battle of Saipan was notable in the course of the war for several reasons. First, one of the most critical events took place at sea on July 19-20 when the Japanese Navy suffered a decisive defeat in the Battle of the Philippine Sea; with this, all lines of supply for the Japanese troops on Saipan were cut off. Second, the island was declared secured by the US military on July 9, and nine days later, General Hideki Tojo, the militaristic prime minister, and his entire cabinet fell from power. Third, Saipan was inside the Absolute National Defense Sphere, and the outcome of the battle put Japan itself within the range of US bombers. It was, in retrospect, the beginning of the end.

Ojisan's Story

From the earliest days of our acquaintance, my husband and I have been interested in a parallel in our family histories: my grandfather was captured in the Philippines when Corregidor fell in 1942 and sent to a POW camp in Manchuria, his uncle was captured in the Battle of Saipan and sent to a POW camp in Wisconsin, and both men were stationed on islands where there was no hope of rescue for the losing side. We thought his uncle's story was worth preserving, so in the autumn of 1986, we visited him at his home in Azumino, a lovely area at the base of the North Japan Alps near the city of Matsumoto in Nagano Prefecture, to talk to him about his experiences. Some years later, when we were preparing a manuscript about POW experiences in the war for publication, my husband's uncle gave us permission to include his story, but not his real name or photograph. In our book, *GI Spoon Yonhaibun no Kometsubu* (1999), he was given the pseudonym Kawamura Kazuo, but in this report I will refer to him as "Ojisan," which simply means "uncle." This is his story:

I was drafted when I was twenty years old. The day I left my home in March 1943 to join the army, I went to the village shrine to pray for good fortune in battle. Then, surrounded by a crowd of people shouting "Banzai," I went to Ariake Station and joined the group of foot soldiers going to the training camp for the Matsumoto 150th Infantry Regiment[1].

In 1944, I had the rank of Superior Private in Captain Ushiyama's "Black Leopard" Corps in the Matsumoto 150th Infantry Regiment, which included soldiers from Nagano, Toyama, and Ishikawa prefectures. The Ushiyama Corps had about 700 members, and it was a replacement unit that had been ordered to go to Truk in the Caroline Islands in the Western Pacific. In Yokohama, we joined another group that was heading for the Marianas, and on April 15, 1944, we left for Truk in a convoy of 30 ships. At this time, we knew that the situation in the war was difficult. I imagined that 70% of the soldiers would die, so I had a 30% chance of returning home, but I never thought that Japan would lose the war. After we passed the Ogasawara Islands, we began to see US submarines. Along the way, nine ships split off from the convoy; four headed for Chichijima, and five headed for Guam.

On April 23, 1944, the remaining 21 ships docked in Garapan Harbor on Saipan. We picked up our guns and went ashore. At this point, our orders were changed because it was now deemed impossible for us to move any further south. Instead, the Ushiyama Corps was combined with another group and ordered to stay and defend Saipan. Every morning, we lined up and shouted together, "Ware taiheiyou no bouhatei to naran." (We are the breakwater of the Pacific.) We expected a US attack on the island any day.

On June 11, 1944, it started. Like a flock of birds, 30–50 US planes appeared from every direction and bombed and strafed the port and military installations repeatedly. The next day, they came again. It was said that there were 1,000 planes that came in that one day. It was feared that US ground forces would land, so we were ordered to go to Mount Tapotchau to make a base.

Two days later, the shelling started. Among the five to seven hundred US ships that appeared, I counted 8 battleships, 2 cruisers, and 22 destroyers. On June 15, 1944, US troops landed on Saipan. On June 19, the Japanese military moved its headquarters to some of the natural caves that can be found here and there on Mount Tapotchau. We were shelled day and night, and the military radio communication system broke down. Late that night, there was a plan for us to make a raid on the Americans, but it was chaotic and complicated by poor communication.

I was ordered to be a messenger. I was to tell the soldiers in the smaller companies in the Ushiyama Corps not to die unnecessarily: They should try to survive and effectively use their lives in service of the Emperor. It was night, but the star shells lit up the sky. I left the cave, and I was soon hit by shrapnel in the foot, leg, and buttocks. I looked down and saw 2-3 cm of metal sticking out of my left shoe. I had been injured between my big toe and my second toe. Later, when it was removed, I found that the piece of metal was 4-5 cm long. The wound in my right leg and buttocks was deep, and I lost a lot of blood. I held on to my left shoe and tried to stand up and walk, but I couldn't move.

I managed to return to the cave the next evening. All of the members of my group had left and only a few injured soldiers I did not know were there. US ships encircled the island and shelled it constantly from morning to night. A lighted cigarette or a flash of metal from an aluminum box of

kanpan (dried biscuits) drew fire from the ships off shore. Order broke down among the soldiers. During the night, we dodged bullets and moved from cave to cave and hole to hole. I could see the bombing and the fires on neighboring Tinian Island. I left the cave and went to the beach, dragging my injured leg behind me. I went into the sea and stayed there with only my head out of the water. After I had been separated from my group for about ten days, I got amoebic dysentery. Even though I had not had anything to eat or drink, I often felt the call of nature. I could no longer remember the day or the location of the military headquarters.

My wounds began to fester and smell bad, and it became very difficult for me to move. Everything was chaos as the US attack continued without interruption. I couldn't stay for two days in the same place; I continually moved around trying to escape. At some point, I lost my gun, so I had only a walking stick and, in my jacket pocket, a hand grenade, which I was supposed to use to kill myself if I were captured. One day, I was lying in a cave in a state of exhaustion when I was awakened by the sound of boots and loud voices speaking English. When I opened my eyes, I saw the point of a gun in my face and the boots of three or four American soldiers. I was on my stomach with my arms stretched out over my head. Through a hole in my pants, they could see my buttocks and my wound, which was full of maggots. Somewhere outside of my field of vision, I could hear someone say in English, "Stand up! Stand up!" At that moment, I resigned myself to the situation, thinking, "If you are going to kill me, do it quickly." One soldier, when checking me for weapons, tore my shirt pocket, and the grenade fell out. My watch and my handbook were taken away. My pants' pockets were torn, and my clothing on the upper body was removed. Conscious thought of becoming a prisoner ran through me like an electric shock. An image of my parents and my hometown flashed through my mind. I knew that becoming a prisoner meant that I would never see them again. As their image disappeared, I felt lonely and bleak, and I mentally said good-bye to them.

I was put on a stretcher, carried about 100 meters to the US front line, and put in a jeep. "I'll never get back to Japan," I thought. Because I had a malarial fever of 40°C degrees (104°F), my consciousness was hazy. The words of the Senjinkun (Instructions for the Battlefield)[2] drifted in and out of my mind: "Ikite ryoushu no hazukashime wo ukezu." (A soldier must never suffer the disgrace of being captured alive.) These words, which we soldiers had memorized during our training, haunted me because I was exactly what I knew I should not be — a prisoner. The idea that a prisoner is not human was so deeply engraved on my mind. For a Japanese soldier, becoming a prisoner was the worst thing, and I wanted to kill myself. I had been taught to expect the worst from the Americans, but it didn't happen. Instead, they treated me kindly, and in my turbulent frame of mind, this was almost a letdown.

After we arrived at a field hospital, a medic wiped my whole body with alcohol, and medicine was put on my wounds. In Japan, things such as alcohol, gasoline, or ethanol, were as precious as blood. I was surprised that the Americans used so much alcohol on their enemies, and memories of becoming a

prisoner include the smell of alcohol. A military doctor removed the metal from my wounds, and the medical staff worked hard to treat me. Watching them almost made me forget that I was a prisoner. In response to their kind treatment, I had a feeling of gratitude. Near my bed at the field hospital, I remember seeing three dead American soldiers who looked like wax figures. In the middle of July, after the battle was declared over, I was put on a hospital ship with some wounded Japanese and Korean prisoners and American soldiers. None of the Japanese prisoners knew where the ship was going.

Some said there might be a prisoner exchange. I wondered what would happen if I were to be sent back to Japan. Would I be punished? One morning five or six days later, the ship arrived in Hawaii. As I looked at the island of Oahu, I keenly felt that I had come a great distance, and I definitely thought I had to give up the idea of returning to Japan. I felt like a man without a country. From the ship, I could see thousands of jeeps lined up from the pier to the main road along the shore, mountains of sea mines, and large amounts of other military supplies, and I realized that Japan could never win the war.

In August 1944, I spent about 10 days at a camp near Hickam Field on Oahu. It was very clean, and I felt I was treated like a guest. About 150 Japanese were in beds covered with clean white sheets. We were given khaki-colored clothing, underwear, a hat, and leather shoes. Breakfast was served on a plate with six sections, large and small, and it included bacon, green peas, a boiled egg, and two pieces of bread. On the table were coffee and milk, and we could have as much as we wanted, just like a first-class hotel. I ate cornflakes with milk for the first time. There was meat for lunch and cake or ice cream for dessert. For dinner, there was Japanese food made by the prisoners. I remember hearing another prisoner say, "They'll bill the Japanese government after the war is over."

We didn't work, and we had given no information to the US military, so we could see no reason for this service. We were physically weak and in a state of collapse. We had been released from our hard training and the tensions of battle, and we didn't know what to do. In the morning, we idled our time away by staying in bed. When we heard the MPs shout "Hey! Get up!" we got up, washed our faces, shaved, and cut our nails. Razors and nail cutters could only be used when MPs were watching us. Even though we were very dirty when we arrived at the camp, we were treated well, and we began to feel an appreciation for our humane treatment. I was questioned by an officer[3] in his 30s who had spent 15 years in Yokohama and spoke Japanese well. Japanese soldiers had not been taught what to say or do if taken prisoner. I answered the officer's questions truthfully: I told the officer the name of my unit, the name of the leader of my unit, my branch of service, my hometown, the names of my parents and siblings, my age, my rank, and my own name. My mixed emotions made it hard for me to speak. I mumbled and choked on my words, but the officer encouraged me to pull myself together and speak more clearly. "Be tough! Speak up! I know everything about Japan," he said. The tone of his voice was harsh, but it was not coercive. The officer was a clever man who spoke logically.

Some of the Japanese prisoners started to become "shinbeiteki" (pro-American) and to cooperate

with the officers who interviewed them. Most of us, however, had become prisoners in states of extreme exhaustion or injury in which we couldn't kill ourselves. When we recovered, not only did we feel sorry for ourselves for being prisoners, but we began to feel various other things. We could not serve our country in any other way, so some among us decided to waste American supplies, for example, by using a lot of toilet paper in the flush toilet. The officer knew we hadn't been educated about being prisoners and that we felt uneasy. He told us:

> *Fight until everyone dies; if you become a prisoner, kill yourself. That's what you were taught. But, if you look at Japanese history, it wasn't like that. That was not Japan's old tradition. If you look at history, soldiers didn't do that. Before everyone died, they used a white flag to surrender. In the Sengoku era, soldiers would kill their own lord and go over to the other side. The rule against being a prisoner is only a modern rule, not a traditional one in Japan. On the battlefield, you had no chance of winning and no reinforcements. It is not necessary for you, brave men who fought to the last moment and were captured in a situation in which there was no way out, to feel such sadness and to blame yourselves or hurt yourselves.*

The officer's skill in Japanese, the way he tried to make the POWs feel better, and the consideration he paid to us all impressed me.

The prisoners were divided into two groups: "shinbeiha" (the pro-American group made up of those who had an understanding of democracy) and "aikokuha" (the patriotic group made up of those who could not get rid of their Japanese spirit or military training). I was sent with other prisoners from the patriotic group to the prison camp on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. We were there for about one month, and then we were put on a train. It was an old train, but everyone could sit in a regular seat, and at night, I remember that a conductor came through to light the lamps. During our three-day trip, we could see the Great Salt Lake in Utah for one whole hour, and I remember crossing the lake on a bridge that was caked with salt. We continued traveling east until we arrived at Camp McCoy in Wisconsin. All around, there was nothing but flat land and trees, and in the camp, there were Germans, Italians, and Japanese in separate areas surrounded by fences. In the Japanese section, there were more than 2,000 Japanese prisoners from all over Japan who had been captured at Midway, Attu, Iwo-jima, and the Nanyo-shoto (the Carolines, the Marianas, the Marshalls, and the Palaus). Inside of the fences, several prefab buildings dotted the area, including dormitories, shower buildings, and kitchens where prisoners took turns working and preparing meals. Around the edge of the fences were watchtowers for the MPs. The towers were stern and imposing, but daily life in the camp had a relaxed atmosphere.

In the morning, there was a roll call by a non-commissioned officer, and this was reported to a commissioned officer. Then, we listened to a record playing the national anthem while the American flag

was raised. In the Japanese military, we had lined up in four rows, but here, we were told to line up in five rows. I remember an argument between the Japanese prisoners and the non-commissioned officer in charge of the roll call over whether we should line up in four rows or five. This man was the person we had the most contact with at that time, a very methodical person who had lost two fingers in a battle during the war. One day when he said, "I cannot count you unless you line up in five lines," we found a reason to stop arguing by deciding that we must be smarter than he was after all, and we started lining up in five lines.

After breakfast, from 0900 to 1600, we worked. There were more jobs outside the camp than inside the camp. We were taken in groups of 10 prisoners and an MP by truck to various places to mow grass and cut weeds or do laundry. It was easy work with no quotas. If we were not well, we could say "sick" or "cold" and be absent from work. It was not at all what I had expected; actually, I wondered if this was a real prisoner's life because it was so leisurely. On Sunday, there was no work, only sports or recreation. There were variety shows and plays, ping-pong tournaments, sumo tournaments, and baseball games. The baseball games developed into a tournament with a German baseball team. There were games every week, and eventually an MP team played, too. The games were fair, and everyone forgot about their actual status for a while. Sunday dinner was Japanese food with fish. The people we met when working outside the camp did not seem to feel ill-will toward Japanese; civilian employees at the camp were also polite and gentlemanlike.

The MPs in the camp did not bother themselves with the minor details of our daily lives, but they were very strict with prisoners who were idle and intentionally neglected their work. The punishment for this was solitary confinement. Those prisoners who were put into a solitary cell were given only bread and water. If the prisoners who brought them their food also brought them cigarettes on request, the MPs activated a shower in the ceiling to put them out when they smoked them. The MPs were not violent toward us, but they did use coarse language. I remember hearing words like "bullshit," "goddamn," and "SOB."

I never had any direct contact with the German prisoners, but I heard that the German prisoners stood up resolutely to the MPs without the guilty conscience the Japanese prisoners seemed to have. They even seemed to have pride, and unlike the Japanese prisoners, they knew the details of the Geneva Convention. In talking to the MPs, they knew exactly what to say; in particular, they wanted to know whether or not their work was related to the defense industry. Many Japanese, who did not know the rules of international treaties and lost their self-esteem because they were prisoners, gave themselves up to despair, argued with others, betrayed others, and broke camp rules.

At times, we thought the people outside the camp were worse off than the prisoners. This was just before the Germans surrendered. Generally, older American civilians explained the content of our work and directed us, but they had less soap and tobacco than the prisoners. Some of the prisoners shared their

rations of soap and tobacco with them.

In the camp, a prisoner found some radio parts in the garbage dump, and he put them together to make a radio. There were college graduates among the Japanese prisoners who understood English or German, and at breakfast, there was a prisoner-translated news announcement. Most of our news came either from the illicit radio or from the German prisoners. We heard about the desperate battle on Iwo-jima, the landing on Okinawa, the nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and finally Japan's surrender. We were so tense that we were unable to breathe, and we clenched our fists as we heard the news about the progress of the war. We were dumbfounded when we heard the news about the nuclear bombs and when, the next day, some American religious leaders and scientists voiced anti-bomb sentiments. We could never imagine that kind of broadcast in Japan, where the military controlled the media. We sank into despair on hearing the news of Japan's surrender, but we began to have a flicker of hope in our hearts that we could return home. On the day I heard about Japan's surrender, I recall thinking that the people who had been captured in battle were not the only prisoners. All Japanese had now become prisoners, so my feeling of shame was somewhat lessened.

The prisoners were given adequate amounts of nutritious foods that were not available in Japan at that time, but two times during this period at Camp McCoy the quality of the food dropped, we had to work more, and the MPs and civilians treated us more harshly. The first time was in February 1945, when MacArthur liberated Manila, and the Americans on the US mainland heard about the reality of the Bataan Death March and about the abuse of American POWs in the Japanese prison camps in the Philippines. When the MPs saw photos of the thin and weak American POWs who had been liberated, their attitude toward the Japanese prisoners at Camp McCoy changed. The civilian who oversaw our work became stricter, and he made us do more. Instead of white bread, we were given brown bread, and for a while, there were no eggs. But, these changes lasted for only a short time before things returned to their previous state. The second time the MPs' attitude and treatment changed was just after Japan accepted the Potsdam Agreement to end the war on August 15, 1945. We were silent when we were told about the surrender, while the MPs around us rejoiced loudly and boisterously. When the Germans had surrendered three months earlier, the atmosphere was solemn and the American flag was at half-mast, and the prisoners did not have to work that day. The atmosphere was much different when Japan surrendered, and the solemnity was replaced by a festival air. The attitude of the MPs was arrogant, haughty, and disdainful, like people from a developed country looking down on people from a developing one, the work was harder, and the quality of the food decreased.

At the beginning of September 1945, I was released from Camp McCoy with the group of about 2,000 Japanese prisoners. We were taken by train through Detroit and on west to a camp in California near Sacramento. For four months, we worked there picking cotton on a farm. At Camp McCoy, there had not been any quotas for our work, but in California, our work had a quota. At first, the quota for

picking cotton was 50 lb (22.7 kg) a day, and it gradually increased as we became accustomed to the work to a maximum of 180 lb (81.7 kg) a day. The MPs were strict about the quotas, so some prisoners added small stones to their bags to make up the weight. This period was the most difficult time for us from the point of the amount of work and the harsh attitude of the Americans. I remember two or three times, when we went through Sacramento by bus, a few adults who saw us threw stones at the bus. I also remember that when the MP who was driving the bus broke a traffic rule, the bus was stopped by a civilian traffic policeman, and the driver was scolded. In Japan, it would not have been possible for a civilian traffic policeman to scold a military person.

In January 1946, we were taken south to the port of San Diego, where we stayed in barracks in an old military camp near the sea. The buildings were old and dilapidated, but there were clean white sheets on the beds. It was winter, but the climate of San Diego was mild, so it was much warmer than the winters in Wisconsin or in my home in Azumino. It was also a place of scenic beauty, with rows and rows of tall eucalyptus trees in the camp and a view of the Pacific Ocean.[4] *In San Diego, there were American soldiers who had come back from the war with Japanese swords, flags, and helmets as souvenirs. They jeered at us and made rude comments like "Tokyo no more" or "Tokyo bombed" and made gestures with their hands. The hopeful idea that we could return home was replaced by a feeling of despair that Japan had been destroyed, and there was nothing to go back to.*

In January 1946, we left the port of San Diego on a transport ship bound for Pearl Harbor, so I was once again on the island of Oahu in Hawaii. I spent about one year at Schofield Barracks, a camp 7.5 mi (12 km) north of Pearl Harbor, with the group of about 2,000 prisoners. We stayed in a domed two-story building with beds for 20 people in each room. In the camp, there were showers, a Japanese-style bath, a barber, a small store for daily necessities, a medical clinic, and other facilities. The toilet was just boards over running water in a concrete trench in a simple, roofed structure, but it was adequately sanitary. In the clinic, there were always an American doctor, a dentist, and three or four nurses on duty, and they took care of the prisoners well. I remember being surprised that the nurses received equal treatment with commissioned officers because they would not have been treated that way in Japan. When I had a tooth pulled, and I saw dentistry tools with marks that indicated they were made in Japan, I felt pleased. Every morning for breakfast, there were about six things on the plate, including two pieces of bread, an egg, and bacon, and on the table there was as much coffee, milk, and sugar as we wanted.

After breakfast, we put coffee in a canteen and went off to work in groups of five or six at various jobs related to the military: cutting grass around the officers' quarters and pulling weeds in the camp flower beds, using the press in the laundry, making sheets in the sewing room, cutting wood in the workshop, taking apart truck engines in the garage, taking apart gas masks, shining door knobs in the general headquarters, working on farms and construction sites and in storehouses, hospitals, shops, box-

making factories, and broadcasting studios. Depending on our talents and wishes, some of us also did plumbing, electrical work, furniture-making, machine repair, and loading and unloading of ships, and some translated Japanese military documents that the US had gotten during the war into English. Among the Japanese prisoners, there were two officers, one navy medical doctor and one army lieutenant, who were exempt from all manual labor. In the sewing room, the Japanese prisoners used the sewing machines during the day, and American women used the same machines at night. I remember that the prisoners who worked there often found candy or other things in the drawers of the machines, kind gifts from the women, and the same kinds of gifts were left for the prisoners at the laundry facility.

Kitchen jobs were called "KP," "kitchen police," like MPs were "military police." The jobs included peeling potatoes, washing dishes, serving food, cutting up meat on the bone using a saw, frying cod, and cutting up large wheels of cheese. I had learned to like cheese, which is not a traditional Japanese food, during my time at Camp McCoy in Wisconsin, so I found the cheese especially impressive. When the food was ready, the American soldiers lined up holding their plates, and the prisoners served them. I remember that the seats in the mess hall were divided into areas for blacks and whites. The food and furniture in each area were the same, but among the blacks, the highest rank was sergeant; there were no officers. While doing KP, there were many chances to meet American soldiers who were on their way home from Japan. Some soldiers smiled and said "Thank you" when they were served; others were spiteful or malicious toward us. They pretended to cut off their heads with their hands and using a few words of Japanese, and they said that Japan had been totally destroyed. Some had things that had belonged to Japanese officers, such as Japanese swords, flags, and helmets, as souvenirs.

After work, we went back to our dormitories. There, we were mainly allowed to organize ourselves autonomously. For each dormitory, there was a leader who wore a white armband. Among the prisoners, the Japanese military structure still existed, but we gradually lost our tense "Kougunseishin" (Imperial Army spirit). We began to feel like civilians again, and thoughts that had been repressed for a long time were set free. Many of us lost confidence in ourselves, and we had many questions: Is my family still alive? Does my place in my "koseki" (family register) still exist? When can I go home to Japan? What kind of welcome will I get?

There was trouble between some of the Japanese prisoners and a group Koreans who had been civilian employees of the Japanese military. "We are here because of you Japanese," they said. "You could not even fight until death or kill yourselves. You just ran away. What nerve you have! Now that the shoe is on the other foot, you just have silly smiles on your faces!" In reaction to their release from Japanese oppression after the war, the group of Korean prisoners exploded with anger, but the Japanese couldn't understand their feelings. One night a fistfight started, but the MPs broke it up. Japanese-American citizens of Hawaii tried to sooth our agitated feelings. Every Sunday, they, mostly first-generation immigrants, visited the camp to express sympathy, and they brought us gifts of food. They

called us "Nihon no Heitai-san" (Mr. Japanese Soldier) and sang songs to cheer us up. Some threw bags of food into trucks carrying Japanese prisoners outside the camp. Other people were kind to us, too. I went with a group of five to six prisoners to cut the grass and clean the gardens at American officers' residences on a hill with a view of Pearl Harbor, and among the officers, there were some who were kind. I remember that one German-American petty officer invited us into his own house, and we sat at the table with his family and ate bread and milk during a break. We were paid 15 cents a day in coupons in compensation for our work. Using the coupons, we shopped for drinks, cigarettes and other things at the camp store. Cigarettes (Lucky Strikes and Camels) were five cents a pack. The rest of our payment was automatically deposited into an account.

In January 1947, after two and a half years as a prisoner, I was repatriated. In Yokohama, I changed my American money and got about ¥3,000. At that time, issho of uncooked rice (1,800 cc; a traditional measurement for sake and rice) was ¥40. I appreciated this money, and I felt that it was a lot for an ex-prisoner to receive. From there, I was taken to the old Japanese military school for communications training (radio and telegraph) in the Kurihama district of Yokosuka. I returned the clothing the Americans had given me with "POW" written on it, and I was given civilian clothes and shoes. With my precious ¥3,000 in my hand and a cloth bag containing cigarettes and soap on my shoulder, I was once again a free man in my home country.

When I got off the train at Ariake Station in Azumino, I had a joyful and unexpected reunion with a married sister I had not seen for the nearly three years I had been away from Japan. In the newspaper and on the radio, my family had heard that a group of prisoners was returning to Japan from Hawaii, but they didn't know if I was among them. A little while before, they had found my name in the newspaper, but they had been disappointed to find out that it was someone else with the same name. There had been no official report about me, and because I had been on "gyokusai-no-shima" Saipan, I was presumed dead. The sister who met me at the station had heard that some of the returnees from Hawaii on the ship were survivors from Saipan, so she timed her visit to our parents' home carefully, and she went to the station just in case I was among the people who arrived. In front of the station, she recognized me in one repatriated soldier with a shaggy beard who was looking around in all four directions as though in a daze.

The local newspaper, Shinano Mainichi Shimbun, printed a small announcement about my return to Azumino entitled "Ikita Eirei Kaeru" ("Soul of a Departed Soldier Returns Home"). As a matter of fact, that is what I felt like: a man who had returned from the dead. Through the Swiss government, the Americans had given the Japanese military government a list of prisoners during the war, but because the existence of Japanese prisoners was denied by the military government, in many cases the families were not told that their relatives were on the list. A few days after my return, I went to the village office to register my discharge from the military. It was very different from the hoopla, the

cheering, and the celebrations that I remembered when I joined the army four years earlier. In the village office, there were several people I recognized, but they took care of my discharge procedure in a simple and business-like manner. After a while, the area women's association held a tea party for the three or four of us who had returned. We were served green tea and red and white manju (sweet bean-jam buns). Other than in my own family, that was the only welcome I received, but it was more than enough.

In my neighborhood in Azumino, there were many families in which husbands and sons did not return from the war, and because I had been on Saipan, where every soldier had been expected to either win the battle or die for the Emperor, they wondered why I had come back alive. The situation was painful for everyone, and I just realized it was best for me not to talk about it.

Ojisan's story ended here, and we took some photographs of him in his garden holding his old cloth bag.

A Farming Family in Azumino

Using information from family members still living in the Matsumoto Basin and official information from the Azumino City Office, my husband put together a family tree. Though still incomplete, it now lists seven generations of his mother's family, going back to the early nineteenth century. He found that his maternal grandparents had had a total of nine children over a period of twenty years (six girls and three boys). Ojisan (born 1923) was the third son and youngest child. My husband's mother (born 1919; the one who met Ojisan at Ariake Station on his return) was the fifth daughter, and the sixth daughter was her twin sister, who died at the age of two months. We had heard a story in the family about an older brother who was in the Imperial Guards, an elite division whose job it was to protect the Imperial Family, and this brother was said to have committed suicide. In the official family register, two older brothers were listed: the eldest son, who died at the family home in Azumino in 1932 at the age of twenty-one, and the second son, who died in China in 1939 at the age of twenty-four. We do not know which of these brothers was in the Imperial Guards or exactly how and why they died.

They were a farming family. Before World War II, they had had more than two *choubo* of land, which is more than 6,000 *tsubo*, and a *kura* (storehouse) for the rice they produced, so they could be said to be relatively well off. To put the old measurements for land into perspective, three hundred *tsubo* was the amount of land needed to grow enough rice to feed one person for a year, so one *choubo* was enough land to support ten people. Because they had had no word of him, his family gave up hope of Ojisan's return. During the war, their land was rented out to other farmers in the area for three years. After the war, due to the Agricultural Land Reform Policy, which transferred

ownership of the land from the landlords to the farmers who were using it for a nominal fee, the family lost over one *choubo* of land.

Ojisan's father died about six months after his return. Ojisan stayed on in the family home in Azumino as the head of that branch of the family and grew rice on the remaining land. At the time, many, perhaps most, marriages were arranged, but Ojisan was able to marry a woman of his own choice, a war-time evacuee from Tokyo, though some family members objected to the fact that she did not know how to do agricultural work. They had three children, and to bring things full circle, their eldest son later took his new bride to Saipan for their honeymoon.

Films Related to the Battle of Saipan

Because I was born after World War II, I have only a secondhand knowledge of it, from the stories of those who experienced it in the generations above me, from the mass media (TV, newspapers, radio, and Internet), and from works of fiction (novels, poems, films, and plays). As luck would have it, World War II coincided with the growth of the motion picture industry, and many films have been made about the war. The Battle of Saipan had its share of extraordinary stories, and I found four films that were set there: *Windtalkers, Hell to Eternity, East L.A. Marine*, and *Taiheiyo no Kiseki – Fokkusu to Yobareta Otoko (Oba: The Last Samurai)*.

The first film, *Windtalkers* (US, 2002), focuses on the role played by the Navajo code talkers in World War II. The safe transmission of information was one of the crucial issues of the war for all concerned, and much time and energy was spent on devising and breaking codes. In 1942, 29 bilingual Navajo men were recruited by the US Marine Corps to create a code based on the Navajo language. In addition to receiving rigorous training in methods of communication (Morse code, semaphore, and radio transmission), these men produced an alphabet and a glossary of military terms and words for general use. According to Paul (1973), when making this code, "The men tried to choose words that had a direct association with things that were familiar in their life on the reservation, or within their general knowledge." Many words were taken from nature, for example, *wol-la-chee*, the Navajo word for ant, stood for the letter "A," and *chay-da-gahi*, which means tortoise, stood for "tank." The code talkers took part in every amphibious assault the Marines conducted in the Pacific, and because of their work, they were constantly in demand and on the forefront of every battle. The code they devised was never broken by the Japanese military, and the story of the Navajo code talkers was not declassified until 1968.

The film *Windtalkers* tells the story of two fictional Navajo code talkers and their white Marine bodyguards during the Battle of Saipan. As such, it is as much about cross-cultural understanding in the US military as it is a story about the war itself. In particular, we see the

friendship that slowly develops between code talker Ben Yahzee, a Navajo from Monument Valley on the Arizona-Utah border (played by Adam Beach), and the conflicted Marine of Italian descent from South Philadelphia (played by Nicholas Cage) who is assigned to protect him. In addition to the scenes of fierce fighting on the battlefield, there were also scenes that illustrated the racial tension among the Americans troops, such as a white redneck Marine bullying Yahzee, and scenes of musical harmony and cooperation, such as code talker Charlie Whitehorse (played by Roger Willie) on the Native American flute accompanied by his bodyguard (played by Christian Slater) on the harmonica.

According to an article published in the *Albuquerque Journal* in November 2011, Chester Nez, now age 90, is the last remaining of the original 29 Navajos who created the code. His first experience of using it in battle was on Guadalcanal in 1942. Before the invasion, a Christian chaplain addressed the troops and recited a blessing. Nez recalls, "I held the small buckskin medicine bag my father had sent and said my own silent prayer, "*Give me courage. Let me make my country proud. Please protect me. Let me live to walk in beauty*" (Nez, 2011), and somehow, he did manage to survive the war. After Guadalcanal, he was part of the action on Bougainville, from there he was sent to Guam during Operation Forager, and then it was on to Peleliu and Angaur before he was sent back to San Francisco, having completed his term of duty. About *Windtalkers*, Chester Nez commented that it was "pretty realistic, but he doubts his ranking noncommissioned officer would have shot him if he were about to be captured in order to protect the code" (*ABQJournal Online*, 2011), as happened to Charlie Whitehorse in the film. With respect to the treatment of prisoners of war, Nez had this to say:

> I knew the Japanese (prisoners) behind the fence ate well — US rations. They had plenty of water to drink. Medical care was provided for any who needed it. Many of the US troops resented the fact that the enemy prisoners were so well treated. They knew these men had tortured and killed American military troops. And rumors were circulating that one hundred percent of captured Americans had been killed by the Japanese. . . . The good treatment of the (Japanese) prisoners and (Chamorro) natives on Guam made me proud to be an American. I knew that captured Japanese were not *always* well treated, but I feel sure that any Americans who mistreated the enemy were ashamed. There was no boasting, and no one wanted to talk about that kind of thing. The two cultures — Japanese and American — differed drastically in the way they valued human life. (pp. 186-187)

The second film, *Hell to Eternity* (US, 1960), is a biopic that focuses on the exploits of real-life Marine Guy Gabaldon in the Battle of Saipan. According to the blurb on the back of the DVD

box:

> On a body-strewn Pacific hell, nine Japanese surrender to American troops. Then another handful. Then another. Soon hundreds give up, urged by a lone warrior fighting tough and speaking their language. But the warrior isn't a countryman. He's Marine Guy Gabaldon, a non-Asian kid from the streets of East L.A. From Guy's cross-cultural upbringing in a Japanese-American family to his heroism as he repeatedly risks his life to save untold numbers of fellow Devil Dogs, *Hell to Eternity* tells Guy's rugged, real-life story. He won the Navy Cross . . . and the gratitude of all America. If his tale were fiction, you might not believe it. But it's real. And unforgettable in its courage, sacrifice and honor.

The film stars Jeffrey Hunter (who played Guy Gabaldon), David Janssen, and Vic Damone as white US Marines, Sessue Hayakawa as a Japanese general on Saipan, and George Takei (who later became famous in the *Star Trek* television series) as one of Guy's Japanese-American foster brothers.

The story in the film, which starts in Guy's childhood in Los Angeles, shows how he came to stay with a Japanese-American foster family and learn to speak Japanese. We hear about the attack on Pearl Harbor and see his foster parents sent to the Manzanar internment camp in California and his foster brothers join the 442nd Regimental Combat Team of the United States Army and go to fight in Europe. Guy receives a letter from the draft board, but he is rejected by the US Navy because of a perforated eardrum. He enlists in the Marines and is accepted because of his Japanese language skills. We see him in training camp in California, with his buddies on liberty in Honolulu, then fighting like a hero during the Battle of Saipan. Using his language skills, he convinces Japanese soldiers and civilians hiding in caves to come out and give themselves up, and in the dramatic scene at the end of the film, he confronts the general who is urging the soldiers and civilians to make a banzai attack and brings back hundreds of prisoners.

A biopic is expected to have fictionalized episodes, and this film certainly takes liberties with the actual story of Guy Gabaldon. For starters, Jeffrey Hunter, the actor chosen to play Gabaldon, was over 6' 0" (183 cm) tall and classically Hollywood-style handsome; Gabaldon himself was a little less than 5' 4" (163 cm) and an outspoken East LA Chicano with a pugnacious spirit. Part of the last scene of the film, at least, was true. On July 8, the day after the most ferocious banzai attack, he single-handedly took over 800 civilian and military prisoners, all survivors of the attack, who had taken refuge near Marpi Point. About the film, he writes:

> One of the major errors [in the film] was the way they depicted the action on Saipan. No,

> they did not exaggerate. Quite the contrary. They toned it down. . . . The movie shows me capturing a General in order to justify the taking of the 800 prisoners. There again the way it actually happened was much more interesting than the manner they showed it. I did take many Japanese officers, but Lieutenant General Yoshitsugu Saito (played by Hayakawa and called General Matsui in the film) had committed suicide the night before I captured the 800. (p. 208)

In his book, *Saipan: Suicide Island*, he tells the story of his childhood, his military career, and his opinions about the unfolding of events on Saipan in the post-war period. He includes sections on how he went to live with a Japanese-American family, learned the language, and gained an appreciation for the traditions of the samurai. In retrospect, though, he noticed big differences between the Japanese Americans he knew and admired in Los Angeles and the Japanese he fought on Saipan. He says, "The Nisei were in reality, Americans, nothing more, nothing less. The Japanese soldiers were as foreign to the Nisei as they were to my fellow Marines" (Gabaldon, 1990).

At the beginning of the war, Gabaldon's own two older brothers joined the US Navy, and on his 17th birthday in 1943, he tried to enlist. He was first rejected by the US Navy because of his height and a perforated eardrum, but the Marines overlooked these and took him because he knew how to speak some Japanese. He was assigned to the 2nd Marine Division, and he saw his first action when he landed on Saipan with the rest of the troops on June 15, 1944. The next morning, he sneaked behind an enemy trench, where he killed one soldier and took his first two prisoners after shouting, "*Te o agete. Shimpai shinaide, korosanaida*." (Hands up! Don't worry, I won't kill you.) Because of his success in capturing or persuading Japanese soldiers and civilians to surrender during the Battle of Saipan, he was permitted to operate on his own as a "lone wolf."

By the time he was wounded in a machine gun ambush and sent back to the US for a medical discharge, Gabaldon was credited with the capture of over 1,500 Japanese prisoners, and he was given the Silver Star. He strongly felt, however, that he was a victim of discrimination and deserving of a higher award. He says:

> Sgt. Alvin York captured 55 German soldiers (in World War I) and was awarded the Medal of Honor. He deserved it, and much more. But you must remember that in his case it was a White man capturing fellow White men, both Christians at that. While in my case I captured an enemy of a race almost unknown to the American public at that time. There was no common bond such as religion, race, or customs. And they were diehard soldiers who had sworn to kill themselves before surrendering. I accomplished what everyone said was impossible, yet the Medal of Honor recommendation was knocked down to the Silver Star

because of extreme racism which was prevalent in the Corps in the early forties. (pp. 64-65)

In 1960, around the time *Hell to Eternity* was released, his Silver Star was upgraded to the Navy Cross, which is the highest military decoration in the Marine Corps, and second only to the Medal of Honor. Gabaldon's continued disappointment eventually led to the making of the third American film, *East L.A. Marine* (US, 2006). According to the blurb on the back of the DVD box:

> *East LA Marine* is the true story of WWII Marine Guy Gabaldon who singlehandedly captured over 1,500 Japanese during the bloody battle of Saipan in the summer of 1944. This all-but-forgotten American hero was Hispanic and raised by a family of Asian-Americans before enlisting in the service when Pearl Harbor was attacked. His amazing accomplishments should have brought him the Congressional Medal of Honor he so truly deserved. This film will try to change that.

Rather than being another fictionalized story of World War II, this film is a documentary that intersperses historical footage of the Battle of Saipan with scenes of Saipan today, events in Gabaldon's life, and interviews with Gabaldon himself, two of his sons, and various people who knew him. It ends with a plea to have his Navy Cross upgraded to a Medal of Honor, and the DVD box contains a postcard to be signed and sent to the Secretary of the Navy in support of this campaign. In any case, Guy Gabaldon led a very full and active life. He lived for about twenty years on Saipan, and when he died in Florida in 2006 at the age of 80, he was survived by his second wife, a Japanese-Mexican woman, and nine children.

The fourth film is *Taiheiyo no Kiseki – Fokkusu to Yobareta Otoko* (Japan, 2011). The English title is *Oba: The Last Samurai*, and the film is based on the book of the same name. It focuses on the story of Captain Sakae Oba in the Battle of Saipan. In real life, Oba worked as a geography teacher at a public vocational high school before joining the Army in 1934. He was sent to fight first in Manchuria, and then in Shanghai, before being sent to Saipan. Though the American forces officially announced that Saipan had been secured on July 9, 1944, Oba and a group of men continued fighting in the hills surrounding Mount Tapotchau using guerilla-style tactics for another 512 days. It was not until December 1, 1945, three months after the formal ceremony of surrender on the deck of the USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, that Oba and his remaining 46 men gave themselves up. Author Don Jones was a US Marine stationed on Saipan at that time, and he participated in a patrol that was ambushed by Oba and his men. Later, he was assigned to a US Navy hospital for Japanese patients on Saipan as an interpreter, and after the war, he worked as a Foreign Service officer in Japan. In 1965, he located Oba, and the two became friends, but it was not until 1980 that Jones suggested

writing a book. Over a period of three weeks, he spent eight hours a day recording Oba's memories of Saipan, which he turned into a novelized version of Oba's story. Jones claims that the incidents in the story are factual, though some characters are a combination of two or more people, and some names were changed to protect the privacy of those still living.

The film opens near the end of the Battle of Saipan as the Japanese are preparing for the banzai attack of July 7, 1944. The Japanese defenders of the island expected men and supplies to arrive any day to reinforce them; they did not know that in the Battle of the Philippine Sea on June 19-20, Japan had suffered a decisive defeat and that no one would be coming to rescue them. Oba (played by Yutaka Takenouchi) survives the banzai attack and joins other Japanese soldiers and civilians in the jungle to regroup and continue fighting. His cleverness in evading capture and stealing US military supplies earns him the nickname "Fox" from the Americans. Among the memorable characters in the film are Aono (played by Mao Inoue), a nurse who bitterly hates the Americans for killing her family, and Horiuchi (played by Toshiaki Karasawa), a tattooed former member of the yakuza. Captain Lewis (played by Sean McGowan) is the sympathetic American officer who speaks Japanese and admires Oba's fighting spirit; he has the job of explaining Bushido to his commanders, which he does using *shogi* pieces. At the end of the film, Oba surrenders his sword to an American officer, but he does so on his own terms, and only after receiving an official order from the Emperor.

In a review of the film, Schilling (2011) writes that the actor who plays Oba "has the emaciated look and weary manner of a hardened fighter with no illusions about the ultimate outcome." In other words, Oba does his duty, as he understands it, to the very end. One of the most interesting and important points of his life story is that Oba did not die on *gyokusai-no-shima* Saipan. In both the book and the film, there were scenes in which he disagrees with other Japanese soldiers about *gyokusai* (death with honor) in the banzai attack on July 7. This scene can be found in the book:

> "What the hell do you mean?" asked Morita, his face a mixture of incredulity and anger. "That is . . . ah, did you say our death will be useless, sir?"
>
> "Sit down, Lieutenant," Oba said as he lowered himself to a log and removed one of his remaining cigarettes. The young officer hesitated, then, declining the offer, sat on a rock facing the captain.
>
> "We are in a war." Oba began slowly because he was not sure what he was about to say. He only knew that he wanted to convince this headstrong young man that he was wrong. "To win this war, we must be stronger than the enemy. If not at one place, like Saipan, then overall, in the entire area of combat. It is the duty of all of us to take as many enemy lives as

possible before laying down our own for the Emperor. By committing *hara-kiri* or by taking part in a suicide attack, we fail the Emperor, because we lessen Japan's strength by our death. If every soldier in the army were to follow Saito's order, where would we be? The war would be over immediately, and we would have betrayed our Emperor, our country, and our families." (p. 59)

In a similar scene in the film, his argument is much more succinct, "We fight to win, not to die."

Oba survived the war, was eventually repatriated, and, like Ojisan, he had to deal with the people at home who did not understand why he had not died. According to Saipan historian and tour guide Gordon Marciano, "Oba insisted that continuing to fight for their country was more honorable than so-called honorable suicide, but many labeled him a coward after the war. In fact, Oba was ceremonially stripped of his "posthumous" promotion to major — which had been awarded in the belief that he had died during the charge" (Gilhooly, 2011).

It's a small world on Saipan. Gabaldon met Jones at the Japanese language school that was organized on Saipan after the campaign, he fought Oba and his men on Mount Tapotchau, and in later years, he knew Oba personally.[5] In 1981, when Gabaldon, Jones, and Oba met on Saipan for a World War II reunion and to promote Jones's book, Oba told Gabaldon that he had been shot by Corporal Horiuchi, the tough fighter and former member of the yakuza who had been killed by a Marine in a later ambush.

Ojisan's story would also make a fine film or television drama, but unfortunately, something similar has recently been done. From April 4 to September 24, 2011, a television drama series called *Ohisama* was broadcast on NHK. It was set in Matsumoto and Azumino, where Ojisan lives, and it followed the lives of those on the home front during World War II and in the post-war years. The main character was a young woman with a very sunny personality who would have been about the same age as Ojisan, and the actress who played the part was the same one who played the embittered nurse Aono in *Oba: The Last Samurai*.

Understanding the Japanese

In June 1944, cultural anthropologist Ruth Benedict was assigned to study Japan. By this time, the tide was beginning to turn against the Germans in Europe, and the landing of the American forces on Saipan brought the war in the Pacific one step closer to the end. In the opening chapter of the book she wrote, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, she explains:

> Whether the issue was military or diplomatic, whether it was raised by questions of high policy or of leaflets to be dropped behind the Japanese front lines, every insight was important. In the all-out war Japan was fighting we had to know, not just the aims and motives of those in power in Tokyo, not just the long history of Japan, not just economic and military statistics; we had to know what their government could count on from the people. We had to understand Japanese habits of thought and emotion and the patterns into which these habits fell. We had to know the sanctions behind these actions and opinions. We had to put aside for the moment the premises on which we act as Americans and to keep ourselves as far as possible from leaping to the easy conclusion that what we would do in a given situation was what they would do. (pp. 4-5)

One of the aspects of Japanese culture covered in Benedict's book is the policy of "no surrender" in the war, and in relation to this policy, Ojisan mentions the mental turmoil he experienced over becoming a prisoner, his lack of training in what to say in case of capture, and the reluctance he felt about returning home not having one his duty to his country. Benedict explains the difference in the way of thinking as follows:

> Any Occidental army which has done its best and finds itself facing hopeless odds surrenders to the enemy. They still regard themselves as honorable soldiers and by international agreement their names are sent back to their countries so that their families may know that they are alive. They are not disgraced either as soldiers or as citizens or in their own families. But the Japanese defined the situation differently. Honor was bound up with fighting to the death. In a hopeless situation a Japanese soldier should kill himself with his last hand grenade or charge weaponless against the enemy in a mass suicide attack. But he should not surrender. Even if he were taken prisoner when he was wounded and unconscious, he 'could not hold up his head in Japan' again; he was disgraced; he was 'dead' to his former life. (p. 38)

On Saipan, the policy of "no surrender" affected the civilians as well as the soldiers. According to reports from American GIs, one of the most puzzling and appalling things was the behavior of the Japanese adults after the battle was over: many of them chose to end their lives, and those of their children, by jumping off either Suicide Cliff onto the sea of rocks and trees or off Banzai Cliff onto the rocks in the water below. The US military dropped leaflets, broadcast promises of good treatment, and sent out leading citizens to talk to people, but the results were not encouraging. Educated to believe that the Americans would treat them cruelly, urged on by the Japanese military, and in a state of panic because the end was near, many of the survivors of the

great banzai attack fled to the Marpi Point area to commit mass suicide. As shown in the film *Hell to Eternity* and described in *Saipan: Suicide Island*, Gabaldon was able to convince 800 people, military and civilian, to give up, but there were many more who would not listen to him. He says:

> They would look at me with hatred and defiance, then toss their struggling children and infants on the rocks down below, to a painful and slow death. Then the adults would jump, breaking their arms, legs and ribs. They would lie there moaning and groaning. There was absolutely nothing we could do to help them at that time. We would not be going down the cliffs until the next day. . . . This carnage took place only because the two races did not understand each other. The cliff suicides are my worst memories of the Saipan Campaign. (p. 263)

A Trip to Saipan

Saipan is just a three-hour flight from Tokyo. In September 2011, we visited the island and spent five days exploring as many of the sights related to World War II as possible using a rental car. The following are the highlights among the places and things we saw.

From the window of our "mountain view" room at our hotel in Garapan, we could see Mount Tapotchau in the distance with the word "Peace" written halfway up in large white letters against the background of green trees. Mount Tapotchau, at 1,555 feet (474 meters), is the highest point on the island. The road to the top passes through a residential area that includes both large, beautiful homes and gardens and lower-income properties. Not far from the top, the asphalt ends, and the last section of the road is an unpaved washboard. This ends in a small parking lot, and there is a walking path to peak. The 360° view of the island of Saipan, neighboring Tinian, and the surrounding ocean is spectacular. For a while, we were alone on the peak, but gradually groups of tourists began to arrive, and we could hear the guides' explanations and see people taking photographs.

Our hotel room also overlooked Paseo de Marianas, the pedestrian mall in the commercial center of Garapan. This area of about four square blocks contains shops selling souvenirs, clothing, and daily necessities, restaurants, bars, night clubs, karaoke places, and massage parlors. Many of the buildings are run-down, and many businesses have closed due to the economic downturn. Only on the evening of the weekly street fair, which featured local food and products plus singing and dancing by local children, was it bustling with activity. One interesting monument on the pedestrian mall was a small building called a *Houanden* that faced the direction of Japan and had originally been on the grounds the *Daiichi Kokumin Gakkou*, an elementary school for Japanese children. It had once contained photographs of the Emperor and Empress and a copy of the *Kyouikuchokugo*, a handbook containing the Imperial Message on Education first published in 1890 during the Meiji era.

At the northern end of the island along Chalan Pale Arnold (Highway 30), there is a string of four war monuments within walking distance of each other. Driving north from Garapan, the first of these, the Korean Memorial, was constructed in 1978 to honor the Koreans who were brought to Saipan as conscripts in the Japanese military or as forced laborers. Next is the Okinawa Memorial, constructed in 1968, to honor the approximately 10,000 Okinawans who had moved to Saipan to work in the sugarcane fields and had died in the war. The liveliest monument was the Last Command Post, concrete bunkers riddled with bullet holes, with several heavy guns still in place out front. Most of the tour vans parked here, and food and souvenirs could be purchased at stalls near the road. Last in the line is the Japanese Peace Memorial, which was constructed in 1974. The monument itself is quite simple in design, almost stark. The location, however, at the base of Suicide Cliff, gives it considerable impact.

Maybe it was just the wind, but when we drove up to the top of Suicide Cliff or walked out to the Banzai Cliff Memorial on the northern tip of the island and peered over the edge, I could hear the sound of feet and sense the lingering feeling of desperation. The row of monuments at the Banzai Cliff is not actually at the place where most people flung themselves to their deaths, but a few hundred yards farther along, so that one looks back at the curve of the cliff where so many gave up their lives. Among the monuments, it was a surprise to find one that had been donated by Zenkou-ji, the largest and most prominent Buddhist temple in Nagano City, where I lived for 21 years. Apparently, car break-ins have become a problem on Saipan, so the rental car company warned us not to leave valuables in sight in the car wherever we parked. We found, however, that guards had been stationed in many of the parking areas at the monuments, and some, such as the one at the Banzai Cliff Memorial, were very friendly and willing to chat.

South of Garapan along Chalan Pale Arnold (Highway 30), we wandered around the grounds of the Old Japanese Hospital, the CNMI Museum, and Sugar King Park, with its large statue of Matsue Haruji (1876-1954), which was erected in 1934. Matsue, the “Sugar King,” had studied agriculture at Louisiana State University in the US. He developed the sugar industry on Saipan through his company, Nanyo Kohatsu Kaisha (South Seas Development Company), in the 1920s and 1930s and built the Sugar Train, a narrow gauge railway around the island. It was amazing to note that the statue had not been damaged in the fighting.

Further south of Garapan along Beach Road around Chalan Kanoa, we found the US World War II Soldiers Memorial and the Veterans Memorial. This is the area where the US troops came ashore on June 15, 1944. Along the beach, there are still some partly-destroyed concrete bunkers and one Japanese tank on display on a raised platform, and out in the water stuck on the reef, parts of two US tanks that never made it to the beach are still visible. What was once a battleground is now a pleasant recreation area. There are many picnic tables, and there is a good path for walking,

jogging, or cycling. As we walked along the sand, we saw local families enjoying a day out, and four little local girls playing in the water near the shore called out to me to take their picture.

American Memorial Park was within walking distance of our hotel, so I visited it several times during my stay. It was established in 1978 and is managed in cooperation with the US National Park Service. Spread over 133 acres, the park contains recreational facilities, a museum, and various monuments. Walking through the forest in the area that was once a Carolinian village, I saw large land crabs for the first time, and I remembered reading somewhere that American GIs had complained about them getting into their foxholes. In the museum, we watched a 20-minute film, looked at the exhibits, and shopped in the bookstore. The ranger on duty, a middle-aged local woman, told us that her mother had survived the war and had many stories to tell like the ones in the museum. The Court of Honor and Flag Circle, which was dedicated on June 15, 1994, on the 50th anniversary of the invasion, lists the names of over 5,000 American Marines, soldiers, seamen, and airmen who gave their lives in Operation Forager and the Battle of the Philippine Sea. I paused before the section containing the names for the 4th Marine Division to recall that Major General Harry Schmidt, the division commander of "The Fighting Fourth" that landed on the Blue and Yellow beaches on June 15, 1944, was the grandfather of one of my friends in San Diego, California. On the Carillon Bell Tower, dedicated in 1995, we were touched by the following message: "This memorial has been erected by the United States of America in humble tribute to its sons who paid the ultimate sacrifice for the liberation of the Marianas." The most poignant monument, however, was the Marianas Memorial, which was dedicated in 2004 and lists the names and ages of almost 1,000 Chamorros and Carolinians who lost their lives in the conflict. The words at the entrance to this memorial — *Your destiny is not yours to design* — are more than apt, given the history of the indigenous people on Saipan in modern times.

My overall impression of Saipan was mixed. The Marianas Visitors Authority web site describes Saipan as follows: "This tropical paradise offers beautiful white sand beaches with crystal clear water and pure, fresh air. Here you will find a well-balanced mix of beautiful nature with modern hotels, nightlife, and shopping. . . . The Chamorro and Carolinian are the indigenous people of these islands. They are warm and friendly, and welcome visitors to their islands." The reality is that the little towns on the island have a sad look to them; there are too many vacant and rundown buildings and too many things here and there that need to be cleaned up. After the earthquake, tsunami, and resulting nuclear disaster in Japan on March 11, 2011, about six months before our visit, the number of Japanese tourists sharply dropped. According to statistics compiled by Japan Tourism Marketing Co., the percent change for outbound Japanese tourists for the Northern Marianas for January to December 2011 was −24.0% from the previous year. (Compared to an overall −2.2% decrease in outbound Japanese tourists to all regions of the world in the same

period.) Certainly, in 2011, businesses that depend on Japanese tourists on Saipan were badly affected, but the decline there has obviously been going on much longer than that.

Areas of the island related to World War II have been well preserved and organized (complete with informational signs in four languages: English, Chamorro, Carolinian, and Japanese), and they are important places for tourists to visit. Yes, the people we encountered in the hotels, shops, restaurants, and other tourist facilities were warm and friendly, and many were quite happy to spend time chatting with us, but it was sometimes difficult to tell whether they were Chamorro, Carolinian, or immigrants from other Asian countries, such as the Philippines. And yes, the island itself is indeed very beautiful. With all of the bombs and flame-throwers that were used during the Battle of Saipan, the vegetation was pretty much burned off at that time, but it has grown back. Once again, there is plenty of lush greenery on the island, and the sea around it is clean, very warm, and many wonderful shades of blue.

Conclusion

World War II, an all-out struggle for dominance on an epic scale, was a turning point in the lives of everyone who experienced it. After the battle was over on Saipan, people were left with military statistics, environmental destruction, social upheaval, and many, many individual stories that showed the best and worst of human behavior. Eventually, buildings were rebuilt, plants grew back, injuries healed, and people got on with their own lives again, but the stories remain to help us remember that (to paraphrase the words on the Marianas Memorial) for the local people on the island and the soldiers who were sent there to fight, "their destiny was not theirs to design."

When I think about Ojisan's story, especially after visiting the island of Saipan, many new questions come to mind:

> Did he kill anyone in battle? Did he ever enjoy a night out in Garapan? In which cave was he hiding when he was captured?
>
> Did he stand on the top of Mount Tapotchau and see the view of the whole island ringed with American ships? He was unable to resist when he was captured, but why didn't he use his grenade before that critical moment as he had been taught to do? Was this a conscious, or an unconscious, decision?
>
> He was badly wounded early on, and he was taken prisoner around June 30[6], about two-thirds of the way through the campaign. It is not likely that he knew senior US military commanders such as my friend's grandfather or US Marines such as Gabaldon, Jones, or the Navajo code talkers, and he may not have known Captain Oba. Corporal Horiuchi, though,

the former yakuza who fought with Oba at the end, came from Captain Ushiyama's "Black Leopard" Corps, in the Matsumoto 150th Infantry Regiment. Did Ojisan know him?

After the war, was he, like Oba, "posthumously demoted"? Did his family ever try to get their land back? And why, so many years later, wouldn't he allow us to use his real name or the photograph we took of him holding his old cloth bag?

Toward me, Ojisan has always been friendly, mild-mannered, and perfectly natural in his behavior, and I am glad that he chose life. I could tell that he never would have thought of leaving his birthplace if he had not been caught up in the whirlwind of events at that time, and I always wondered how much his desire to be as inconspicuous as possible after his return from the war was due to the fact that he did not die in spite of his training or the fact that he dared to return to his home. He is the last of the nine children in his family. There are so many more questions that I would like to ask him, but he is now too ill to answer them.

Appendix: From the Military Archives in Tokyo

In December 2011, we visited the military archives at the *Boueikenkyusho* (The National Institute for Defense Studies) in Ebisu, where the archivist introduced us to various documents related to Saipan. The following is a translation of a report on the Matsumoto 150th Infantry Regiment which corroborates Ojisan's story, and his name is mentioned in one of the lists that follow it.

150th Infantry Regiment (Ushiyama Corps) — Outline of the Battle
(date and author unknown)

In March 1944, within the Matsumoto Tobu 50th Infantry Regiment (the traditional name for this regiment; see Note 1), a supplementary battalion was formed for the purpose of sending reinforcements to Truk; the leader of this battalion was Captain Kazuyoshi Ushiyama. On April 3, 1944, the battalion left Matsumoto. On April 15, they sailed from Yokohama Harbor, and on April 23, they arrived in Saipan. Because of worsening conditions on Truk, the battalion was temporarily quartered in civilians' houses in Garapan. From April 24 until June 10, their job was to unload the accumulated supplies of weapons, ammunition, and food. On June 11, from about 1300 until June 12 at about 1200, there were major air raids by American planes taking off from aircraft carriers near Saipan. American planes bombed Donnay ammunition dump, and the Ushiyama Corps moved there to help. Fifty soldiers under Second Lieutenant Kobayashi were given guard duty for the food supply depot at Donnay. The rest were sent to wait at the Mount Tapotchau headquarters. On June

13 from 1000, the island was surrounded by a task force of American ships; at 1300 they began shelling the island. This lasted until June 16 at 1000. On June 16 at 1000, four companies of American troops landed on the south coast near Asulito Field. Some groups within the regiment tried a night attack on the Americans, but because of the star shells which lit up the sky, they were almost all killed in the shelling. On June 17, the Americans landed on the beach at Laulau. At that time, part of the regiment near Asulito Field moved to Laulau, and they killed two companies of American troops. On June 20, Captain Ushiyama was injured. At 2100, 35 soldiers were selected from each platoon in the Ushiyama Corps and were sent to the south side of Saipan Shrine (near Sugar King Park) for a night attack. They were almost all killed, and the number of soldiers left in each platoon was very small. On about June 22, the Ushiyama Corps engaged repeatedly in hand-to-hand fighting with the Americans. Nearly one half of the Ushiyama Corps combatants were killed. On about June 24, the Americans who had landed on Laulau Beach moved to Donnay and occupied the water source. The Americans attacked the Ushiyama Corps from the side when they moved around the north side of Mount Tapotchau. From June 24, the Ushiyama Corps was not able to get water supplies. From around June 26, the west coast area was put under the command of Chief of Staff Kuroda; the Ushiyama Corps was included in this command. Around June 29, the left flank of the Ushiyama Corps was destroyed in an attack. At 2000, the remaining members of the Corps moved to Radar Hill. Around July 1, the troops under Kuroda, including the Ushiyama Corps, moved to Hell Valley. American troops reached this area, and they engaged in hand-to-hand combat from July 3 to the evening of July 5. Chief of Staff Kuroda and most of the soldiers were killed in this action. On the night of July 6, they were ordered to move to Banaderu Air Field. By this day, of the original 50 soldiers who were guarding the food depot at Donnay, two remained. After assembling at Banaderu, there is no more record of the Ushiyama Corps. (Most had been killed in action; a few survived and acted on their own.) On July 7 beginning at 2300, the remaining soldiers and many civilians began to move as a group. In the early morning hours, they made an all-out attack on the Americans that extended as far as Matansha Elementary School, and they returned the way they had come. The leader was Captain Kobayashi, the mayor of Garapan. On July 8, for the purpose of *gyokusai*, they made a second attack; 700 people survived. They had almost no weapons or ammunition. On July 9, they made a third attack; 400 people survived. They had almost no weapons or ammunition, so they attacked using stones and the branches of trees. On July 11, they made a fourth attack; 150 people survived. On July 13, they made a fifth attack; 18 people survived. After that attack, they moved to Marpi Point, joined with other survivors and made a group of 120 people. They had no weapons. Of the group, about ten were professional soldiers; the rest were civilians. After July 13, they broke up into small groups and went to the beaches or into the jungle to wait for the [Japanese] Navy to rescue them.

The above is a report made by the known survivors. After July 13, the survivors attacked American supply depots to get food and weapons. They fled into the jungle and into caves to hide. Many people died of nutritional deficiencies and fevers. A few were cared for by the Americans, but some are still returning to Japan from the jungle.

Attached to this document, there are two lists. The first is a list of *seikan seru mono* (soldiers who survived and returned to Japan); it contains nine names and addresses in the Matsumoto Basin. The second is a list of *seizon suru to mitomerareru mono* (soldiers who were recognized as survivors and were in the US or on Saipan); it contains eleven names, and it includes Ojisan. So, according to this document, out of the original 700 in the Ushiyama Corps, 20 survived the war.

Notes

1 According to Horikoshi, the regiment based in Matsumoto was traditionally called the *Hohei Dai 50 Rentai* (50th Infantry Regiment), but for special purposes, two times — in Showa 12 (1937) and in Showa 18 (1943) — the name was changed to *Hohei Dai 150 Rentai* (150th Infantry Regiment). Ojisan was in the Ushiyama Corps during the time the 50th Infantry Regiment was called the 150th Infantry Regiment.

2 The *Senjinkun* (Instructions for the Battlefield) was a pocket-sized booklet that was first issued to soldiers in the Japanese military on January 8, 1941, in the name of War Minister Hideki Tojo. It was a supplement to the *Gunjin Chokuyu* (Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors) that had been issued on January 4, 1882, in the name of the Meiji Emperor. These two documents laid out the official code of ethics for all military personnel. They were relatively short, and all military personnel knew them by heart. The *Senjinkun* listed military regulations and stressed combat readiness, a common spirit of comradeship, filial piety, veneration of Shinto gods, and Japan's national polity. The code specifically prohibited surrender or retreat. Lieutenant General Saito quoted lines from the *Senjinkun* in his farewell speech before he committed ritual suicide on July 6, the day before the banzai attack: "... As it says in the *Senjinkun*: 'I will never suffer the disgrace of being taken alive,' and 'I will offer up the courage of my soul and calmly rejoice in living by the eternal principle.' ..." (Toland, 1970).

3 Ojisan referred to the officer who interviewed him at Hickam Field in 1944 as Captain "Hagirisu," but I could never confirm the correct spelling of this name in English.

4 From Ojisan's description of an old military camp in San Diego with rows and rows of tall

eucalyptus trees and a view of the Pacific Ocean, it sounds like he may have been at Camp Calvin B. Matthews, which was decommissioned in 1964 and became the campus of the University of California at San Diego, where I later went to school. Also, my grandfather returned to his home in San Diego after being released from the POW camp in Mukden, Manchuria, on September 11, 1945, so, by a quirk of fate, their paths crossed during the short time Ojisan was in San Diego.

5 It is interesting to note that Jones and Gabaldon had quite different opinions of Oba. Jones's admiration for Oba's fighting spirit was clearly evident in the book and the film. Gabaldon also found him a worthy opponent up until the Instrument of Surrender that ended the war was signed on September 2, 1945. But, during the three months that followed, Oba continued his activities, including shooting and killing off-duty US Marines using weapons he had stolen from the Americans. This, Gabaldon felt, was not admirable and was clearly a violation of the rules of war as set down by the Geneva Convention.

6 On June 25 around sundown, the 8th Marines (2nd Marine Division) captured the top of Mount Tapotchau. Ojisan was likely captured in the days that followed.

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On top of Mount Tapotchau, Saipan. A plaque with a photo of Captain Sakae Oba surrendering his sword on December 1, 1945, can be seen to our right.